

An orange speech bubble with a tail pointing towards the bottom right, containing the text "WHAT'S NEXT" in white.

**WHAT'S
NEXT**

ALEXANDRIA



What and Why?

A **community conversation** about civic engagement and planning for the future, and how Alexandrians can best **participate in the public decisions** that shape their City.

- **Expanding** participation
- Making public participation **easier**
- Clarifying the City's and community's **shared expectations for the public involvement process.**



Community Shaped Process

- Small groups discuss/raise issues with report outs, rather than town hall where few get to speak
- Minimize staff presentation time
- Solicit input before issues framed/decisions made
- Post verbatim feedback/summaries on website
- Offer online opportunities to participate
- Use members of the community as facilitators
- Simplify language
- Offering Spanish interpretation, childcare
- Provide significant advance notice of meetings



Steps in the WNA Process

September 2012 - June 2013

- Series of 4 community dialogues where participants worked together in small groups; also offered “virtual tables” – an opportunity to participate in real time online video engagement during the dialogues
- 4 opportunities for online engagement, including online polls and online comment boards



Completed Sept-June:

1. Civic engagement principles: What standards are we *all* going to follow?
2. Civic engagement framework: What process we can expect for every project?
3. Communication and Engagement Tools: How can we expand the number of people who participate, and improve their experience?
4. Guidelines for successful implementation and evaluation: What do we need to do to make this work, and how will we measure success?



Handbook – Principles

Respect

Easy Participation

Early Involvement

Inclusiveness and Equity

Meaningful Engagement

Mutual Accountability

Transparency

Evaluation

Sustained Collaboration



Handbook - Framework

Why it's needed:

- Consistency throughout City government
- Shared understanding of what to expect (phases, engagement strategies, tools, deliverables)
- Build trust and transparency

How it will be used:

- Each project has a *Civic Engagement Framework* that the community helps to create
- Content includes: Project goal, timeline, deliverables for each phase, and tools and activities required to accomplish goal

Civic Engagement Framework

City Department:

Project:

Goal :

Overall project timeline:

Phase 1 Information (Gathering, Organizing, Understanding)

Key Principles:

Meaningful Engagement
Mutual Accountability
Early Involvement
Easy Participation
Inclusiveness and Equity

Engagement Activities:

- ☐ Hold public meetings that are well-organized and include group work to hear community opinions
- ☐ Collect research and identify community concerns
- ☐ Educate community on important issues about the project (online and in person)
- ☐ Reach out to the community to encourage participation (phone calls, door knocks, flyers, online)
- ☐ Visit a project location as a group

Tools:

- ☐ Offer online participation (surveys, forums, social media)
- ☐ Use graphics, maps, 3D models, & pictures to explain project

Products:

- ☐ Community engagement plan
A preliminary report that describes the project, schedule, tasks, and budget
- ☐ Clear goals for each step of the process that must be met before moving to the next step
- ☐ Community's list of issues to address and their view of what we should be working toward

2 Options (Discuss and Evaluate Options)

Key Principles:

Sustained Collaboration
Easy Participation
Transparency
Inclusiveness and Equity

Engagement Activities:

- ☐ Hold public meetings that are well-organized and include group work to hear community opinions
- ☐ Provide information about options, including what has worked well in other places
- ☐ Research possible options and potential impacts

Tools:

- ☐ Offer online participation (surveys, forums, social media)
- ☐ Hold group meetings with people who are affected by project
- ☐ Use graphics, maps, 3D models, & pictures to explain project

Products:

- ☐ Short term report with realistic options for achieving the shared view
- ☐ Provide tools to help the community choose between the options

3 Recommendations

Key Principles:

Transparency
Easy Participation
Sustained Collaboration
Mutual Accountability
Meaningful Engagement

Engagement Activities:

- ☐ Hold public meetings that are well-organized and include group work to hear community opinions
- ☐ Present final options and how/why they were selected
- ☐ Hold public hearings where community members can make statements for City officials to consider, revise, and/or approve

Tools:

- ☐ Offer online participation (surveys, forums, social media)
- ☐ Hold group meetings with people affected by project
- ☐ Hold meetings open to the public for elected officials to hear comments and make decisions

Products:

- ☐ Report with options that have been reviewed and chosen; Report will show how community ideas guided the final recommendation, and will include the proposed plan and schedule to complete the work

4 Implementation and maintenance

Key Principles:

Transparency
Meaningful Engagement
Sustained Collaboration
Mutual Accountability
Evaluation

Engagement Activities:

- ☐ Offer visits to project sites as needed
- ☐ Evaluate how well the plan is being carried out
- ☐ Identify someone from the City who is responsible for the work and who citizens can call
- ☐ Involve the community in carrying out the plan in each phase of the process

Tools:

- ☐ Provide a schedule of project activities to carry out the plan
- ☐ Notify community about public meetings

Products:

- ☐ Use objective measurements to determine if the community engagement in the decision-making process was successful
- ☐ Provide regular progress reports



Handbook - Meaningful Engagement

- Before event: *early notice*, *clear agendas* and *access* to background information
- Type of event: what's *most productive* for issue at hand? In person or online? Workshop, town hall or open house?
- After event: prompt *follow up*, *show* how *input* is shaping next steps
- Communications *toolbox* – what works best for broad participation?



Handbook – Successful Outcomes

- Working **together** to solve common problems.
- Public is **well informed**, has a clear **understanding** of how to participate.
- More people **participate** in (and benefit from) City decisions.
- Community takes an **active role** in organizing others.
- City **decisions/actions** are accepted because they **reflect** public **participation** in a transparent process.
- Engagement approach is **consistent** throughout City government.
- Community and government have **mutual** trust.



Implementation

- Some tasks centralized, managed by **City Managers Office**, others managed by **Departments**
- **Training** for staff and community to improve **engagement** skills and understanding of WNA expectations
- **Ingrain** WNA **principles and framework** into City government culture



Implementation

City Manager's Office

- Set **expectations**: policies & procedures
- Allocate **resources** for citywide training
- Ensure **consistent application** of principles/framework
- Manage performance **accountability**
- Manage internal **communication**

Departments/Staff

- Attend **training**
- Apply principles/framework to all projects in the **City's Interdepartmental Work Program**
- **Develop scope and manage participation processes**

Interdepartmental Working Group



Evaluation

Interdepartmental Working Group

- Review evaluations completed by departments
- Develop and share with community a proposed plan for future annual review, which would consider:

Use of Framework – is it **used consistently** by applicable City processes? Does it need to be revised?

Use of Handbook – is it used/referenced when **designing engagement processes**? Are elements out of date?

*Define process for **updating Handbook** when necessary.*

Communications/Outreach – have new avenues emerged? Are there **new digital engagement techniques**?

Implementation structure – is there a problem with **consistency** or has the effort become too **administratively onerous**?



Upcoming Projects

Upcoming projects in the FY14 Interdepartmental Work Plan will follow the principles, framework and guidelines in the handbook, including:

- Public Art Master Plan
- Eisenhower West Transportation Study and Small Area Plan
- Bicycle Pedestrian Master Plan
- Stormwater Management Plan



Next Steps

- **Sept. 6 - October 11**
 - Draft Handbook public review period; including online comment board
- **Sept. 3 - October 30**
 - Board and Commission briefings
- **October 28**
 - Revised Final Draft posted prior to public hearing
- **Nov 16** City Council Public Hearing
- **Nov 26** City Council Vote

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- Questions or comments?